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ABSTRACT

The development of speech communication curricula in two diverse small colleges--one state supported and the other a private liberal arts school--is traced in this paper. Following a description of each college, the paper discusses the problems each faced in developing its speech communication curriculum, including opposition from members of other departments, lack of time and faculty to provide courses in all essential areas, the number of preparations necessary for each instructor, and the lack of exposure to several perspectives for the students. The paper also discusses five factors that contributed to the success of the programs: (1) student demand for the courses, (2) perseverance of the faculty, (3) clearly articulated goals, (4) reciprocity with other departments, and (5) faculty participation in state, regional, and national professional conferences. The paper concludes by offering possible strategies for use by other small colleges in similar situations. Appendixes contain course listings for the two colleges. (FI)

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CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN THE SMALL COLLEGE

Abstract

This paper traces the development of a speech communication curriculum in two widely diverse "small college programs," one in a state supported institution, the other in a small, private, liberal arts institution. Concerns and problems common to each are examined, and an attempt is made to generalize from the two cases. Possible strategies for other small colleges in similar situations are proposed.

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"The Small College Speech Instructor: Jack of All Trades?"

Speech Communication Association
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CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN THE SMALL COLLEGE

The first setting for description was a relatively small (5,500 undergraduates) college of arts and sciences, one of several units of a major state university system. A few years before, courses in rhetoric had been retained in the English department, and the only courses specifically labeled speech were transferred administratively to the Theatre Arts department. When the only full-time speech instructor resigned, the administrative decision was made to discontinue the remaining 3 courses (nine semester hours). The in-coming chairman prevailed with his request that a broader-based Speech Communication curriculum be attempted on an experimental basis before discontinuation of the program. A new speech instructor was employed with the expressed commission from the chairman and divisional dean to develop such a curriculum, expanding the scope beyond the existing oral interpretation, debate, and public speaking courses.

Within five years there were 24 courses offered (72 semester hours), taught by 4-3/4 FTE faculty. Three tracks within the speech major were available to the 28 majors, and total enrollment had exceeded 200 students per semester. Discussions to create a separate department of Speech Communication were being held with the same administrators who had wanted to discontinue the program five years earlier.

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The second setting was a small (1,600 undergraduates), private liberal arts college which offered 2 speech courses (6 semester hours),

one of which had not been taught in three years. The college chaplain taught one section of public speaking each semester administered through the department of Dramatic Arts and Speech. Apparently, the administrative decision was made by the Dean of the College and the President that "some more speech courses might be nice." Indications were that the department chairman was less than enthusiastic about the decision, desiring instead that if a faculty line was to be made available, it be used to enlarge his three person theatre staff.

In the first year, sixteen new speech courses were approved by the general faculty and a major in speech communication endorsed. Two years later the total number of majors was 58 with total enrollment in speech classes exceeding 125 per semester. A second (part-time) instructor was added, and in the third year discussions were opened to add additional part time staff to bring the total to 2-1/4 FTE. A decline in total enrollment, and the concomitant budget restraints, precluded the desired addition of full-time personnel, although hopes were high for the following year.

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The purpose of this paper is to compare and contrast the curriculum development in each of these settings, highlighting the relative and respective successes and failures. Concerns and problems common to each are examined, and an attempt to generalize from the two cases is made.

There are several key elements in such a "starting from scratch" endeavor, many of which can also be found in any so-called "small college

program," defined by the Small College Committee of the Senior College and University Section as having five or fewer full-time faculty.

Pivotal to the entire process is the instructor, who should be a generalist capable of teaching in a variety of areas. Since most graduate programs require a degree of specialization, many PhD's find this difficult. The small college instructors, however, of necessity must be willing to teach outside of their area of degree specialization. This may require only the "stay one chapter ahead" method, but more desirably would be assisted by additional study at least through short courses in state, regional, and/or national professional meetings. Sometimes it is necessary to teach a basic course, oral interpretation, communication theory, and debate in the same semester. Flexibility and willingness to learn are necessary characteristics.

Departmental and higher level administrators must be willing to view and represent the program in a positive light. If they are unwilling initially, as was the case in the second setting, a major task of the instructor is to persuade them, verbally and by example. Part of this persuasion might lie in the personality of the instructor, but the greater part consists of meeting the evaluative criteria of the administrator. These criteria probably would include professionalism, academic rigor, student response, and hard work.

The basic course would probably be the first course to be designed. Volumes have been written and spoken on the nature and design of the basic course, but in this context it is the "bread and butter" course of an expanding program. It should be sufficiently general to

provide an overview of the discipline, especially those aspects of the discipline covered by advanced courses in the program, and enjoyable enough to cause students to want to take the advanced courses. While academic rigor must not be sacrificed for enjoyment, the two need not be mutually exclusive. Further, the study of communication has been proven to be immediately practical; that is, unlike some college courses, it is not necessary to wait until graduation to be able to put into practice with satisfaction what the student acquires in the course. Generally this combination of rigor, wherein the students know they are learning something significant; enjoyment, where the students may find that learning can be fun; and practicality, where the students can experience immediate satisfaction from their theoretical understandings and acquired skills will result in a word of mouth reputation of quality for the course. This, in turn, brings in more students, and the program is moving.

Advanced courses should be cycled in such a way to permit tracking of majors through the requirements. When there is only one or two instructors, every course will not be offered every year. It is imperative, however, to be able to assure the prospective majors that all required courses will be available during their academic career. Since some students will not decide until the beginning of their junior year to declare speech majors, a two year cycle seems to be the most functional. (See Appendix A)

"But what can I do with a speech major?" seems to be the universal first question. Caring and personalized advising is essential, where vocational as well as educational goals are clearly

understood and articulated. Choices of electives and minors need to reflect those goals in an attempt to assure the students of their marketability. The instructor needs to be sufficiently involved with other faculty and the general community to develop contacts for potential internships.

In the first setting reported, the developing speech communication program was viewed with a high degree of suspicion by the education and psychology departments, both of which had their own courses in group process or group dynamics. Informal contacts within the general faculty were invaluable in interpreting the differences and similarities of the disciplines. The study of communication can be illustrated as complementary to and supportive of these other disciplines rather than threatening. Teaching methods and theoretical content can be demonstrated to be as rigorous as those employed in the other disciplines, but usually most profitably through informal conversation instead of formal confrontation. Initiative must be taken by "the new kid on the block" to interpret the content and methodology to others. In the second setting reported, early efforts were made to assure the collegiality of members of the faculties of psychology, sociology, dramatic arts, English, journalism, business, political science, education, and religious studies. Subsequently, minor fields of study were developed to support majors in those other fields focusing on General Speech Communication, Communication Behavior, and Speech Performance. (See Appendix B)

This obvious attempt to provide supplementary and supportive services won the alliance of the other departments rather quickly, and they in

turn welcomed the speech majors into their classes with some degree of understanding of the speech students' needs and interests.

For all of the enjoyment and satisfaction of seeing a new program grow and develop, and for all of the advantages of working in a small college (set forth in another paper in this session), there are problems and frustrations in curriculum development. Without attempting to duplicate the presentation of the advantages and disadvantages of teaching in a small college, a few problems need to be acknowledged.

On a curriculum development level, time and energy frequently cannot be stretched far enough to incorporate all the areas which should be included to provide a comprehensive curriculum. For example, in the first setting reported earlier, no courses in argumentation and debate were ever incorporated. They were high on the list of priorities to be added as soon as personnel could be obtained, but unfortunately the financial resources never became available. In setting two, while debate was offered, it was only offered on alternating years. In both settings some unfortunate combinations were necessary, e.g., interpersonal and group communication had to be taught in a single course. In the second setting, argumentation and persuasion were taught as a single course; debate II met concurrently with debate I, with extra assignments for the advanced students; and a similar situation existed for students repeating the laboratory in interpersonal communication. Certain significant areas had to be omitted completely, e.g., classical rhetoric, rhetorical theory and criticism, non-verbal communication, organizational communication. The conclusion becomes that if financial and personnel resources are limited, and a relatively comprehensive

program is desirable, some compromises are necessary and the best program possible is produced under whatever constraints exist.

At conventions and other meetings the small college instructor may become justifiably envious of colleagues from larger institutions who "teach four sections of non-verbal (or organizational) communication (or whatever)" with only one preparation which can be carried over from semester to semester with minor adjustments. No wonder they have time for research and publication, especially with the assistance of their current graduate students, and their former graduate students who can assist with data collection and analysis from their present teaching positions and with <u>their</u> graduate students! The small college instructor has little or none of this assistance, and frequently must prepare three or four new courses each semester. Many times, when courses are repeated every other year, new developments in the field--if the small college instructor has managed to keep up with them--require a complete revision of design and content from the time the course was taught previously.

On a more personal level, in a situation where there is only one or two instructors, and to some extent where there are as many as four or five, it can be a professionally lonely existence. Without the spirited interchange with colleagues the instructor runs the risk of becoming stale and non-productive. The demands on time and energy made by an expanding program are wearying. One of the most demanding requirements tends to be the time spent on the caring and personalized advising alluded to earlier. Extra- or co-curricular activities for and with

students seem to eat into the time others in larger institutions might spend in research activities. Usually in a newly developing program, library resources are initially inadequate, and as they are expanded, priorities must be given to supporting course work, usually at the undergraduate level, rather than acquiring those resources that would assist post-doctoral research. Budget in smaller institutions, particularly private institutions, are a constant and increasingly restraining problem. The solitary, or near solitary, instructor(s) is/are hard pressed to establish clear personal, professional, and program priorities.

A position paper submitted to the Small College Action Caucus at this convention pointed out that two major problems faced by the small college instructor at state, regional, and national conventions are socialization and visibility. When only one or a few colleagues from the same institution attend a meeting, the opportunities for making new acquaintances are reduced proportionately. The small college instructor has few if any graduate students (or former students) in attendance, which would further extend the social contacts. Since program planners tend to select participants on the basis of who they know personally, or who they know through mutual acquaintances or who they know by virtue of research and publication, and since the small college instructor is not well known, it has been difficult for small college personnel to break into the programs of these events. With the Senior College and University Section placing a high priority on small college programs, this barrier seems to be coming down, as this convention program indicates.

The greatest problem faced by the small college, however, probably is the lack of exposure to several perspectives for the students. One of the most telling criticisms of the proposed major in speech communication in the second reported setting was that it appeared (incorrectly) that students could complete a major course of study and never take a course from any other than the one instructor. Academically this is imprudent and professionally costly to the student. Ironically, a second telling criticism of the major was that communication skills are vital to every student regardless of major, and if the speech communication major was approved, the single full time instructor would be obligated to teach upper division courses, thereby limiting the number of service courses that might otherwise be available to all students. As reported, the major was approved anyway.

In spite of these problems, at least five factors seem to emerge that contribute to success in a small college program. The first is results. As students become interested in the field, the demand for courses increases. As the student demand increases, the program grows and gains recognition throughout the college and the administration. As colleagues in other disciplines became aware of the quality and value of the curriculum, they began to feed students into the courses, thereby increasing the demand (and the teaching load!) which in turn provides persuasive evidence for administrators that more professional help is needed.

All of the above requires perseverance. There are times when the pressures build, and the program seems to be ignored, and the efforts

seem to go unnoticed and unrewarded. In these times, the small college instructor may be tempted to "throw in the towel," and look for a position where these specific problems can be overcome in a larger context. While this perseverance is not always rewarded, the results are usually sufficient to keep these "Jacks/Jills of All Trades" where they are, by choice.

Such program development does not happen overnight. The perseverance must be tempered and complemented by clearly articulated goals that are in keeping with the stated mission of the institution. Well developed plans to achieve those goals must be presented to the general faculty and administration in such a way as to enlist their support.

The small college instructor depends on reciprocity. Colleagues in other departments cannot assist and support the speech program if the instructors in the speech program are unknown or unwilling to assist and support them as well. Interest and involvement in campus-wide, total faculty activities and responsibilities lead to exposure and visibility. Exposure and visibility lead then to assistance and support.

Finally, participation in state, regional, and national professional meetings (when budget allows) provide helpful sessions and short courses to hone teaching skills. These sessions provide opportunities to stay abreast of recent developments and research in the field. Sessions such as this, such as the Small College Action Caucus, and such as the informal Small College No-Host Cocktail Party provide the socialization and collegiality which can offset some of the problems faced in the isolated

situation where most participants in those sessions work.

In conclusion, it must be observed that the hard work and perseverance pay off. Last May the college represented in the second setting graduated its first Speech Communication majors. It was a gratifying, satisfying, and rewarding time when the first speech major in the 78 year history of the college walked across the platform. It was equally gratifying that the second graduate received the degree with high honors, is now enrolled in a Master's degree program in a highly regarded LARGE college program, and plans to pursue a doctorate at one of the most prestigious LARGE programs in the discipline.

(Embarrassingly, the third graduate is at this writing still unemployed, but a .667 batting average would lead the league every year!)

APPENDIX A

Courses are offered on the following cycle:

FALL SEMESTER, EVEN NUMBERED YEARS

Introduction to Speech Communication
Interpersonal and Group Communication
Oral Interpretation
Public Speaking
Argumentation and Persuasion

SPRING SEMESTER, ODD NUMBERED YEARS

Introduction to Speech Communication
American Public Address
Debate I
Business and Professional Speaking
Advanced Communication Theory
Communication and Leadership
Debate II

FALL SEMESTER, ODD NUMBERED YEARS

Introduction to Speech Communication
Introduction to Communication Theory (non-majors only)
Interpersonal and Group Communication
Public Speaking
Discussion Methods

SPRING SEMESTER, EVEN NUMBERED YEARS

Introduction to Speech Communication
Laboratory in Interpersonal Communication I
Seminar in Rhetoric
Business and Professional Speaking
Advanced Communication Theory
Laboratory in Interpersonal Communication II

Special Problems in Speech Communication and Communication Internships are available to upper division students by approved proposal every semester.

APPENDIX B

Required for a major in Speech Communication:

30 semester hours, including Introduction to Speech Communication, Interpersonal and Group Communication, Public Speaking, Argumentation and Persuasion, and Advanced Communication Theory, plus an additional 15 hours, not more than 6 of which may be taken in Special Problems in Communication and/or Communication Internships.

Required for a minor in Speech Communication:

18 semester hours, including Introduction to Speech Communication, Interpersonal and Group Communication, Public Speaking, Argumentation and Persuasion, and Advanced Communication Theory, plus an additional 3 hours.

Required for a minor in Speech Performance:

18 semester hours, including Introduction to Speech Communication, Public Speaking, Argumentation and Persuasion, Debate I, and two of the following: Oral Interpretation, Business and Professional Speaking, and/or Debate II.

Required for a minor in Communication Behavior:

18 semester hours, including Introduction to Speech Communication, Interpersonal and Group Communication, Discussion Methods, Laboratory in Interpersonal Communication, Communication and Leadership, plus an additional 3 hours.